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ABSTRACT

This booklet provides broad guidelines to assist schools and communities in creating individual crisis response plans. The introduction recommends that each school needs to individualize guidelines to encompass community resources (clergy, mental health, and law enforcement agencies). The section on the role of the school notes that schools act "in loco parentis" and thus are compelled to act in a reasonable and prudent manner. The second section on getting started claims that districts and schools should assess district needs and develop policy, procedures, and/or guidelines. Ten questions to include in a school plan are listed. Ten issues facing schools in crisis are listed. Response team membership and its functions are described. Topics which need to be covered in prevention training for response teams, school personnel, and parents and community are listed. Twenty-one items important to the intervention phase of crisis response are listed. Eleven items important to the postvention phase of crisis response are listed. Forms for resource listing, a checklist of guidelines for response plans, and sample forms for at-risk status, suicide potential, and an action plan are included. (ABL)

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BE AWARE
BE PREPARED

Guidelines for Crises Response Planning for School/Communities

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BE AWARE BE PREPARED

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If you think a crisis will not occur in your school/community, think again. A high school student shoots himself on a frequently used pathway to an elementary school, a bus accident critically injures several students, a middle school student overdoses and dies, a favorite teacher dies of a heart attack; unfortunately these are incidents that have happened in Colorado schools. Any of these situations could happen anywhere, anytime, anyplace. Is your school prepared to handle such a crisis? Many are (hats off to you), but many are not.

Each circumstance will, by its unique nature, dictate specialized procedures and individual planning. This booklet has broad guidelines to assist in creating individual plans.

The impact of any of these crises is devastating for school and community. Denial is the first reaction to any crisis and often the predictable range of emotions is overlooked. The grief process must be addressed to enable survivors to deal with the tragedy.

Schools and communities need to work together to provide reassurance and a sense of security. Timely and appropriate efforts can alleviate the intensity of the crisis, identify those students or staff who need individual or group help, and facilitate the recovery process. When putting together a "crisis response plan," each school needs to individualize guidelines to encompass the community resources (clergy, mental health, and law enforcement agencies). Good luck.

BE AWARE BE PREPARED.

INTRODUCTION

ROLE OF THE SCHOOL

A crisis, be it an accidental death or suicide, brings with it unfamiliar emotions and feelings for students and staff. Schools must be prepared to handle potential self-destructive behavior among students as they respond to the crisis.

We need to remember schools act "in loco parentis" or "in place of the parent" which compels staff to act in a reasonable and prudent manner. This implies a tremendous burden for administrators, counselors, teachers, and other staff under threat of liability. *(Vidal, John, ***Student Suicide: A Guide for Intervention***, NEA Professional Library, National Education Association, Washington, D.C., p. 12, 1989.)

School officials or employees, according to legal consensus, are responsible to "reasonably forsee" that injuries are prevented and conditions are corrected to protect students. With this in mind the Colorado Department of Education offers guidelines for writing a crisis response plan.

ROLE OF THE SCHOOL

GETTING STARTED

When designing a "crisis response plan" districts and schools should assess district needs and develop policy, procedures, and/or guidelines. **District leadership is essential** in the development of school/community "crisis response plans," and in assessing community knowledge level and resources to set goals and objectives for specific agency responsibilities.

Reasonable questions to include in a school/community "plan" are:

- Can individuals be identified who are willing to develop and maintain a school/district "plan"?
- How will we work with other agencies?
- What response components (prevention, intervention, postvention) will we implement?
- What time lines will we use?
- What financial and personnel resources will we commit?
- How will we coordinate the plan?
- What will be each person's and agency's role in the response plan?
- What communication channels do we need to create for participants?
- What training will we use/provide for the various participants?
- Who will provide training?

GETTING STARTED

ISSUES FACING SCHOOLS IN CRISIS

- Potential law suits
- Community denial vs. sensationalism
- Little understanding for the need to address the grief process after a crisis
- Role of the media in reporting the facts
- Varied philosophies of dealing with a crisis
- Support for school personnel/caregivers
- Importance of community and school working cooperatively
- Individual/school/community territory issues
- Keeping the program going
- Release time for caregivers

ISSUES FACING SCHOOLS IN CRISIS

RESPONSE TEAM

One of the most effective tactics a school/community can employ in a "crisis" is to have a Response Team in place. Teams could be made up of:

District Members: Administrator to act as liaison such as:

- Director of Special Services
- Director of Counseling
- Director of Psychology/Social Work
- Substance Abuse Coordinator
- At Risk Coordinator

School Members: Recommended but not limited to:

- Building administrator
- Counselor
- School psychologist/social worker
- Parent (advisor)
- School nurse
- Teacher
- Student (advisor)

Community Members:

- Minister
- Police officer
- Physician
- Other concerned individuals

NOTE: School systems, particularly these in rural areas, should establish working relationships with nearby mental health professionals who can provide assistance to the team in a "crisis." *(Barrett, Tom, ***Teens In Crisis***, American Association of School Administrators, Arlington, VA, p. 18, 1989.)

Response Team Functions

Planning:

- Define "crisis"
- Develop policy/procedure to deal with a "crisis"
- Identify and coordinate community resources
- Provide training for "team"
- Identify "response team" for prevention, intervention and postvention
- Review yearly and alter "plan" as needed
- Identify coordinator (who's in charge?)
- Organize phone trees

PREVENTION TRAINING

Response Team	School Personnel	Parents/Community
• District policy crisis response plan (rationale for a plan)	• District policy crisis response plan (rationale for a plan)	• District policy crisis response plan (rationale for a plan)
• Roles as team members in crisis	• Staff role in crisis	
• Warning signs of students "at-risk" (identification)	• Warning signs of students "at-risk" (identification)	• Warning signs of students "at-risk " (identification)
• Use of assessment tool		
• Referral process	• Referral process	• Referral process
• Understanding the importance of grief process	• Understanding the importance of grief process	• Understanding the importance of grief process
• Networking with community resources	• Networking with Response Team	• Networking with Response Team
• Evaluation process		
• National and local statistics on students "at-risk" of self-destructive behavior (brief overview)	• National and local statistics on students "at-risk" of self-destructive behavior (brief overview)	• National and local statistics on students "at-risk" of self-destructive behavior (brief overview)
• Importance of role models (social learning theory)	• Importance of role models (social learning theory)	• Importance of role models (social learning theory)
• Professional issues (responsibility, confidentiality, ethics, natural fears)	• Professional issues (responsibility, confidentiality, ethics, natural fears)	• Professional issues (responsibility, confidentiality, ethics, natural fears)

INTERVENTION

- Provide training for all staff. Prevention Component
- Provide training for community.
- Determine who will gather facts and verify information.
- Notify superintendent or designee regarding the "crisis."
- Call emergency staff meeting to inform them of facts and to give them specific directions. (Use a phone tree to call meeting.)
- Dispel rumors.
- Decide who will deal with the media and how (prepare a written statement).
- Identify team member to deal with family.
- Contact family to inform them of need to release information. (Be sensitive to family privacy.)
- Decide what space in the school is conducive to individual and group interaction as needed. (Sometimes going to the groups works best.)
- Decide how the "crisis" is to be announced to the students. (School intercom dealing with death is not recommended.)
- Assign one person to handle all calls. (Provide them with accurate, written information.)
- Reschedule activities as needed, trying to keep things as normal as possible. (We need stability in time of "crisis.")
- Determine who will take care of victim's locker contents in the event of death.
- Withdraw student from school enrollment in the event of death.
- Identify person to notify school of siblings.
- Provide supervision for all students.
- Discuss attendance policy for crisis - determine how and when students will be excused from class.
- Network with community agencies to clarify their roles.
- Provide method to notify parents regarding "crisis" if appropriate. (Reduces rumors.)
- Plan how to evaluate effectiveness of your "plan." (Be creative, such as using case studies by interview and observation techniques.)

POSTVENTION - dealing with the crisis aftermath: responding to survivors.

- Assist students and staff in grieving as a result of their loss.
- Involve community resources.
- Assess identified "youth-at-risk" using specific assessment tool.
- Make appropriate referral based on assessment.
- Debrief staff after crisis. (Remember to include it in your plan.)
- Provide a parent/community debriefing.
- Give support to teachers in dealing with the "empty chair" (i.e. team member to follow student's schedule).
- Identify areas for individual/group help to students and staff ("drop in center"). Make this known to students.
- Establish timelines for follow-up.
- Evaluate effectiveness of plan by simple documentation.
- Identify community problems which relate to the "crisis" - be an advocate for students.

RESOURCES
School Response Team
(Include members here)

* **Chairperson**

District Response Team
(Include members here)

***Chairperson**

Important Telephone Numbers
(Include Helpline, Hospital, Mental Health, Law Enforcement, and other.)

BE AWARE BE PREPARED

GUIDELINES FOR CRISIS RESPONSE PLANS

- ☐ Form "response team"
- ☐ Designate a coordinator (who's in charge?)
- ☐ Define "crisis" for your school
- ☐ Develop policy/procedures
  - ☐ Prevention ☐ Intervention ☐ Postvention
- ☐ Identify and network with community resources
- ☐ Implement training for staff and community
- ☐ Set up space for individual or group help for students
- ☐ Network with media
- ☐ Contact victim's parents to offer care and assistance
- ☐ Debrief staff and provide ongoing help
- ☐ Determine assessment tool to identify "at-risk" students
- ☐ Develop evaluation process
- ☐ Review plan yearly and offer in-service for new staff (update and revise as needed)

SAMPLE

CHILD/YOUTH AT-RISK INDICATIONS

_____ 1. Underachiever (low basic skills)

_____ 2. Excessive absenteeism

_____ 3. Lacks self-discipline (unstructured, disorganized)

_____ 4. Inattentive, distracted

_____ 5. Siblings who have dropped out

_____ 6. Low economic status (reduced or free lunch program, Social Services recipient, etc.)

_____ 7. Family crisis (financial, interpersonal, substance abuse, etc.)

_____ 8. History of retention (1 or more years)

_____ 9. Prior history of suspension or expulsion

_____ 10. Unmotivated, little commitment to school, poor attitude

_____ 11. Loner or alienated (limited or no relationship with peers and staff)

_____ 12. Rebellious or antisocial behavior

_____ 13. Mobility of family

_____ 14. Married and/or teen parent

_____ 15. Teacher recommendation

Student _____

Teacher _____

Date _____

Is this student a

Low risk _____ Moderate risk _____ High risk _____

SUICIDE ASSESSMENT AND INTERVENTION FORM
(Confidential Information)

Referral Date _____ Time _____

Student's Name _____

Date of Birth _____ Age _____ Sex: M F

School _____ Grade _____ Teacher _____

Parent's Names _____ Phone (home) _____

Address _____ (work) _____

Student Referred By _____ Relationship _____

Person Recording Data _____ Title _____

REASON FOR REFERRAL (be specific) _____

_____

_____

Stressors (current disposition)
(Check if applicable)

_____ Loss of significant other by death, divorce, separation (who, when)

_____ Loss of important peer relationships - breakup of boyfriend/girlfriend

_____ Apparent alienation/rejection of parent(s)

_____ Family issues (turmoil, violence, unemployment, mobility, abuse)

_____ Recent failure at school - relationships, sports, academic standing, etc.

_____ Recent involvement with the law

_____ Does not belong to an identified peer group

_____ Other stressors (describe)

Emotional State:
(Check if applicable)

_____ Guilt

_____ Anxiety

_____ Hopelessness/helplessness

_____ Feelings of being bad

_____ Feels should be punished

SAMPLE FORM

Symptoms:
(Check if applicable)
(Ask how long)

_____ Disturbance in sleep
_____ Disturbance in appetite
_____ Weight loss/gain
_____ Isolation/withdrawal
_____ Psychomotor retardation
_____ Accident proneness
_____ Truancy/running away
_____ Aggression/agitation
_____ Impaired ability to concentrate
_____ Hallucinations
_____ Thinking/talking about wish to be dead
_____ Sexual promiscuity
_____ Frequent clinic visitor
_____ Change in personal appearance (unkempt)
_____ Somatic complaints (headaches, etc.)
_____ Drug/alcohol use
_____ Dysphoric mood
_____ Lacks interest

Specifics of the Self-destructive Plan

Method: _____ Is implement available? _____ Yes _____ No

Place: _____

Time: _____

Has student made a public declaration of his/her intent? _____ Yes _____ No

Probability of rescue: _____ High _____ Low

Reversability of method: _____ High _____ Low

History

Prior ideation: _____ Yes _____ No When? _____

Prior threat: _____ Yes _____ No When? _____

Prior attempt: _____ Yes _____ No When? _____

Hospitalized for suicidal behavior? _____ Yes _____ No

Received outpatient treatment? _____ Yes _____ No

Resources (as seen by child)

Resources (as seen by interviewer)

Lethality (intent): _____ High _____ Medium _____ Low

ACTION PLAN

Date _____ Time _____

Crisis Team Members:

Action To Be Taken	Yes	No	Person Respon.	Date Done
Contact parents	_____	_____	_____	_____
Notify school administration	_____	_____	_____	_____
Notify police	_____	_____	_____	_____
Notify social services	_____	_____	_____	_____
Notify community mental health	_____	_____	_____	_____
Outside therapist involvement	_____	_____	_____	_____
Notified (release/file)	_____	_____	_____	_____
Safe to let student go home	_____	_____	_____	_____
Student in need of custodial care	_____	_____	_____	_____
Student provided with contact person and phone numbers	_____	_____	_____	_____
Student scheduled with counselor next day	_____	_____	_____	_____
Other (specify):	_____	_____	_____	_____

*From Barrett, Thomas, ***Youth in Crisis,*** Sopris West Inc., Longmont, CO, pp.59-63, 1985.

SAMPLE FORM